

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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An internal task force headed by the Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment, has submitted a report recommending amendments to the **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules**. The recommendations aim to update financial relief to adjust for inflation, integrate psychological support, and streamline law enforcement responses to safeguard vulnerable marginalized communities.

Key Recommendations of the Task Force & NCST

- **Inflation-Adjusted Financial Relief:** Proposal to revise the current relief and rehabilitation amount (ranging from ₹85,000 to ₹8.25 lakh, set in 2016) in accordance with inflation.
- **Specialized Infrastructure:** Establishment of dedicated Relief and Rehabilitation Cells across States and Union Territories.
- **Counselling Mechanisms:** Introduction of structured psychological counselling services for victims, their dependants, as well as the accused.
- **Procedural Efficiency:** Mandatory transmission of FIRs and charge sheets to the designated government officials within 24 hours of registration.
- **Protection Against Counter FIRs:** NCST's proposal to curb retaliatory or false counter FIRs filed against victims or informants reporting atrocities.
- **Livelihood Safeguards:** Measures suggested by NCST to protect land and livelihood rights of Scheduled Tribes facing prolonged land-alienation litigation.

Panel seeks enhanced relief, counselling for SC/ST victims

The task force, headed by the Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment, suggests amendments to the Rules framed under the SC/ST Act; recommendations include relief and rehabilitation cells

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

An internal task force of the Centre has recommended several amendments to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, including raising the relief and rehabilitation amounts that governments are mandated to pay victims of atrocities to adjust for inflation. Also among the recommendations made by the task force are measures to introduce counselling for the accused and the victims and their dependants.

Further, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has separately suggested amendments to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, mainly focusing on introducing a provision to protect the livelihoods of Scheduled Tribe communities who are alienated from their land and are involved in

Rule revision

The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was last amended in 2018 in response to widespread protests from SC and ST communities



prolonged legal battles over it. The NCST has also called for measures to check the registration of "counter FIRs" against those who end up reporting atrocity cases.

In a report submitted to the Centre on July 31, the task force, headed by the Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment, drafted suggested amendments to the Rules framed under the SC/ST Act, which was last amended in 2018 in response to widespread

Recommended amendments:

- Setting up of special relief and rehabilitation cells in States and U.T.s
- Increasing relief and rehabilitation amounts in accordance with inflation
- Fast-tracking FIR and chargesheet procedures
- Measures for counselling for the victims, their dependants, and those accused

Currently, the relief and rehabilitation amount to be paid to victims of atrocities and their dependants ranges from ₹85,000 to ₹8.25 lakh, depending on the seriousness of the crimes under the Act

Territories. One official told *The Hindu* that the idea under discussion at the task force meetings was to increase the relief and rehabilitation amounts in accordance with inflation.

Currently, the relief and rehabilitation amount ranges from ₹85,000 to ₹8.25 lakh, depending on the seriousness of the crimes under the Atrocities Act and the degree of injuries and harm suffered by the victims and their dependants. The amounts were set in 2016.

The task force has also suggested amendments that require FIRs and chargesheets in such cases to be sent to government officials concerned within 24 hours.

The move to initiate discussions on amendments comes as the anti-reservation movement under the "reservation hatao andolan" banner is growing to also campaign for other issues faced by the "general category" in India.

Related Static Dimensions

1. Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 17:** Abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form.
- **Article 15(4) & 16(4):** Enables special provisions and reservations for the advancement of SCs and STs.

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Daily News Analysis

- **Article 46 (Directive Principles):** Mandates the State to promote the educational and economic interests of SCs, STs, and weaker sections and protect them from social injustice.
- **Article 338 & 338A:** Establishes the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) as constitutional bodies.

2. Statutory Framework

- **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989:** Enacted to prevent atrocities against members of SC/ST communities, establishing Special Courts and fast-track procedures.
- **Amendment Act, 2018:** Restored provisions prohibiting anticipatory bail and removed the requirement for preliminary inquiry/prior approval before arrest, reversing a 2018 Supreme Court judgment.

3. Core Challenges in Implementation

- **Low Conviction Rates & Delays:** High pendency of atrocity cases in Special Courts due to procedural delays and witness intimidation.
- **Delayed Financial Disbursement:** Bureaucratic bottlenecks often delay the release of statutory relief funds to victims.
- **Misuse & Counter-Cases:** Frequent misuse of counter FIRs by dominant groups to pressure victims into out-of-court compromises.

Conclusion

Updating the SC/ST Atrocities Rules to account for economic inflation and institutionalizing rehabilitation through psychological support and land-livelihood protections are crucial steps toward social justice. Effective realization of these rights requires strict enforcement of the 24-hour procedural mandate, active oversight by the NCST/NCSC, and speedy trial mechanisms to uphold constitutional guarantees under Article 17 and Article 21.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989:

1. It seeks to prevent atrocities against members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
2. It provides for Special Courts for the trial of offences under the Act.
3. The Act is a constitutional provision specifically enacted under Article 17.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: A)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Protection from atrocities requires not merely punitive justice but also rehabilitation, psychological support and restoration of livelihood." Discuss in the context of SC/ST communities. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

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The Union Ministry of Jal Shakti, through the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), issued a gazette notification amending the **River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016**. The amendment removes the blanket declaration of the Ganga flood plain as a "construction-free zone," replacing the absolute ban with a stratified, approval-based regulatory framework.

Key Highlights of the Gazette Amendment

- **Deletion of Blanket Ban:** Removes the rigid "no-construction" clause across the entire flood plain, allowing regulated development subject to official clearances.
- **Stratified Zonation Framework:** Replaces the single definition with a three-tiered flood plain classification based on flood return frequencies:
 - **Active Flood Plain:** Immediately adjacent to the river channel, submerging at least once every 5 years. Strict prohibition on permanent construction continues, except for temporary setups like religious gatherings.
 - **Regulatory Zone:** Subject to moderate flooding (5 to 25 years frequency). Construction permitted under strict regulatory clearances.
 - **Warning Zone:** Outer periphery subject to rare/severe floods (25 to 100 years frequency). Construction allowed with prior administrative approval.

Centre relaxes construction hurdles in Ganga flood plain

It removes 2016 order's blanket declaration that Ganga flood plain is 'construction-free zone'; new definition may allow construction in areas subject to moderate or rare flooding, after clearances

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The Union government has eased restrictions regarding construction along the Ganga flood plain, paving the way for building projects in areas which are only subject to moderate or rare flooding.

This has been done by revising the definition of a "flood plain" and deleting a clause in the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016, that expressly prohibited construction, according to an August 10 gazette order from the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), affiliated to the Jal Shakti Ministry.

A senior government official told *The Hindu* that the amendments did not represent any "dilution of standards", but rather, attempted to correct an inconsistency in the law.

While the new order does not grant blanket permission for development, it replaces the total ban on flood plain construction



The new order replaces the total ban on flood plain construction with a regulated, approval-based system. FILE PHOTO

with a regulated, approval-based system. Strict building prohibitions are now confined to "active flood plain", with minor exceptions for temporary setups like religious events. In recent months, there have been several petitions before the National Green Tribunal against construction along the Ganga and its tributaries.

'Construction-free zone' Litigants have routinely cited the blanket "construction-free zone" mandate in the 2016 order in their petitions against riverfront roads and em-

bankments, as well as in earlier cases involving municipal sewage treatment plants and riverfront works.

That notification defines the Ganga 'flood plain' as "the area of the river or its tributaries which comes under water on either side of it due to floods corresponding to its greatest flow or with a flood of frequency once-in-a-hundred years."

The 2016 order included a clause saying: "... the bank of River Ganga and its flood plain shall be a construction-free Zone to reduce pollution sources,

pressures and to maintain its natural ground water recharge functions..." Other clauses banned construction in the "active flood plain" of the Ganga, though there was no definition of what constituted "active."

Stratified regulation

However, an amendment to the 2016 order, published on August 10, makes two crucial modifications. It removes the "no construction" clause. It also adopts a stratified definition of 'flood plain' based on flood frequency: an 'active flood plain', which is immediately along the channel that submerges at least once every five years; a middle 'regulatory zone', subject to moderate flooding every five to 25 years; and an outer 'warning zone' on the periphery that floods only during severe 25- to 100-year events.

Beyond that five-year flood line, construction in the 'regulatory' and 'warning' zones is now permissible, subject to official clearances.

Analytical Dimensions & Significance for UPSC

- **Governance & Legal Consistency:** Resolves litigation deadlocks before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) where public infrastructure projects (e.g., STPs, bridges, embankments) faced legal hurdles due to the blanket ban.

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- **Ecological & Environmental Impact:**

- Loss of Natural Buffer: Allowing construction beyond the 5-year flood mark risks degrading riparian ecosystems, reducing natural groundwater recharge capacities, and increasing river pollution loads.
- Disaster Vulnerability: High-intensity, rare flood events (e.g., 25–100 year events) can cause severe structural damage and urban flooding if the regulatory/warning zones are heavily built up.

- **Enforcement Challenges:** Replaces a clear, objective prohibition with a subjective, approval-dependent regime, putting intense pressure on administrative vigilance and state regulatory bodies.

Related Static Dimensions

- **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG):** Implemented by the National Ganga Council under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- **Model Flood Plain Zoning Bill (1975):** Circulated by the Centre to regulate land use in flood plains; enacted by very few states (e.g., Manipur, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand) due to land being a State subject (List II).
- **Ecological Functions of Flood Plains:** Natural aquifer recharge, silt trap, attenuation of flood waves, maintenance of minimum environmental flows (Aviral Dhara), and habitat for endemic species (e.g., Gangetic Dolphin).

Conclusion

The shift from a blanket prohibition to a stratified, approval-based regime aims to balance infrastructure needs with legal clarity. However, the success of this policy rests on rigorous flood-plain mapping, transparent clearance processes, and enforcing strict environmental impact assessments to ensure the ecological integrity (Nirmal and Aviral Ganga) is not compromised.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: With reference to the flood-plain classification under the amended regulatory framework for the Ganga, consider the following statements:

1. The Active Flood Plain is associated with flooding at least once in every five years.
2. The Regulatory Zone corresponds to a flood return period of 5–25 years.
3. The Warning Zone corresponds to a flood return period of 25–100 years.
4. Permanent construction is freely permitted in the Active Flood Plain after administrative approval.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 4 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: A)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Examine how unplanned construction on flood plains can aggravate urban flooding, groundwater stress and riverine ecological degradation. Suggest a comprehensive strategy for sustainable flood-plain management in India. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

A study published in The Cryosphere by researchers from IIT-Bombay and Monash University reveals that glaciers in Ladakh's Zaskar region are moving slower than they did 30 years ago. This research provides crucial insights into how climate change-induced thinning alters ice dynamics in the High Mountain Asia region.

Key Findings & Physical Mechanism

- **Deceleration Rate:** Glaciers slowed by an average of 2.43 m/year per decade between 1992 and 2023.
- **Accelerated Mass Loss:** Ice thinning increased from 0.22 m/year (2000–2005) to 0.57 m/year (2015–2020).
- **Core Dynamic:** Sustained warming causes ice loss → reduces glacier thickness → weakens gravitational driving stress → slows ice movement down toward lower elevation zones.
- **Local Modulators:** Glacial flow is further influenced by debris cover, bed slope geometry, and terminus characteristics (e.g., lake-terminating vs. land-terminating).

Socio-Economic & Hydrological Impacts

- **Peak Water Threat:** Initial rapid melting temporarily increases summer runoff ("peak water"), but continued mass depletion will eventually cause a sharp drop in long-term flow.
- **Indus River Basin Vulnerability:** Seasonal meltwater sustains agriculture, drinking water, and hydropower across the arid Ladakh terrain and downstream Indus basin.
- **Regional Water Security:** Declining ice storage risks long-term water scarcity across transboundary river basins in South Asia.

Related Static Dimensions (UPSC Syllabus Alignment)

Physical Geography

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Ladakh's giant 'rivers of ice' are slowing as the mountains warm

Glacier slowdown has long-term implications for the Indus basin, where glacier melt contributes significantly to river flows during the summer; more melting may temporarily increase runoff, a phenomenon called peak water — but once glaciers lose a substantial fraction of their stored ice, the meltwater contributions are expected to drop

Hirra Azmat

Glaciers look still — but in reality they are constantly moving as they slowly carry ice from high mountains to the lower reaches.

A new study has reported that glaciers in the Zaskar region of Ladakh are now moving more slowly than they did 30 years ago, offering new clues about how climate change is affecting these giant 'rivers of ice'.

The Zaskar region is home to some of the largest, most extensive glaciers in the Himalayas.

They are natural reservoirs of freshwater, which they release as meltwater in the warmer months. This seasonal supply sustains rivers, ecosystems, agriculture, and local communities in the otherwise arid environment of Ladakh.

The glaciers "receive most of their snowfall from the mid-latitude westerly disturbances during winter," study co-author and IIT-Bombay doctoral student Tirthankar Ghosh said.

"Most of the glaciers are located at quite a high altitude compared to other regions. This unique climatic setting means that their response to climate change can differ from glaciers in the eastern or central Himalaya, making them valuable natural indicators of environmental change," he said.

Rate of slowing

In their paper, in the journal *The Cryosphere*, the researchers described investigating how glacier flow changed from 1992 to 2023 across 12 glaciers in the Zaskar Himalaya and how these changes relate to ongoing glacier thinning due to climate change.

They used satellite data to derive the glaciers' surface velocities, which determine how efficiently ice is transferred from the high accumulation zones to the lower elevations, where melting is greatest.

"When a glacier loses more ice than it gains over many years, it generally becomes thinner," Mr. Ghosh said.

"Thinner ice exerts less driving force, causing the glacier to flow more slowly. This is why changes in glacier velocity can reveal important changes within a glacier."

The researchers found that glaciers were moving more slowly across the terrain, having slowed by 2.4 m/year per decade on average. The team also found the pace of surface thinning had increased from around 0.22 m/year between 2000 and 2005 to around 0.57 m/year between 2015 and 2020.

The study also reported that the glaciers were not all responding to warming in the same way. Factors such as glacier geometry, debris cover, and conditions at the glacier's terminus (or snout) can all influence how quickly it flows, Mr. Ghosh said.

'Ice transport slows'

Mehnaz Rashid, a lecturer of environmental management and sustainability at the University of Teesside, the U.K., said a major strength of the study is its long observational record, covering more than 30 years. Dr. Rashid was not associated with the study.

While most Himalayan studies have focused on glacier retreat or mass loss, which are important indicators of climate change, Dr. Rashid said the new study linked three processes — mass loss, glacier thinning, and glacier flow — to show that thinning is not just a consequence of warming but also changes the glacier's ability to move.

"As glaciers become thinner, the driving stress decreases, and ice transport slows," she explained. "That means the lower parts of the glacier receive less replenishment from higher elevations, which can make continued shrinkage more likely. In that sense, the study helps explain not only what is happening to Himalayan glaciers but also the physical mechanism behind those changes."

On a different note, Rayees Ahmed, project scientist at the Divesha Centre for Climate Change, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, said the study focused on 12 representative glaciers whereas the Zaskar basin hosts around 1,755. So while the glaciers the researchers studied do cover a range of settings, he advised caution before extending the findings to every glacier in Ladakh.

"Surface velocity observations derived from satellite imagery also cannot directly reveal processes occurring beneath the glacier, such as subglacial hydrology or basal sliding, which can strongly influence glacier motion," he said. "In addition, long-term field measurements of ice thickness, glacier mass balance, and bed conditions remain limited in this region, making it difficult to fully attribute all observed changes."

Effect on Indus basin

That said, according to Dr. Ahmed, glacier thinning and slowdown have important long-term implications for the Indus basin, where glacier melt contributes significantly to river flows during the dry summer months. More melting may temporarily increase runoff, a phenomenon called peak water — but once glaciers lose a substantial fraction of their stored ice, the meltwater contributions are expected to drop.

"This does not mean the Indus basin will immediately experience water shortages solely because glaciers are slowing down. River flows also depend on snowfall, rainfall, groundwater, and water management," Dr. Ahmed explained.

"Nevertheless, continued glacier thinning and slowdown are clear indicators that long-term glacier water storage is declining, which could have important implications for water security, agriculture, hydropower, and downstream ecosystems in the coming decades."

Similar glacier slowdowns have been reported across the European Alps, Alaska, the Canadian Arctic, the Andes, and parts of the Tibetan plateau. Most of these regions have a similar dominant mechanism: as glaciers become thinner, they experience lower driving stress, causing them to flow more slowly.

"However, there are important exceptions," according to Dr. Ahmed.

"Some glaciers can temporarily accelerate due to increased meltwater reaching the glacier bed, glacier surges or interactions with proglacial lakes or marine environments. Therefore, while glacier slowdown is becoming increasingly widespread, local glacier characteristics still play an important role in determining individual glacier behaviour," he said.

The experts emphasised in their paper that they need long-term observations to understand how glaciers respond to climate change over decades. And while satellite observations have greatly improved glacier monitoring, Mr. Ghosh said more ground-based measurements of glacier thickness, mass balance, ice temperature, and meltwater discharge are required to validate satellite data and improve glacier models.

"Continuous weather observations at high elevations are also critical because climate conditions can vary considerably across mountainous terrain," he added.

(Hirra Azmat is a Kashmir-based journalist who writes on science, health, and environment. azmatirraaj@gmail.com)

THE GIST

A new study has reported that glaciers in the Zaskar region of Ladakh are now moving more slowly than they did 30 years ago, offering new clues about how climate change is affecting these giant 'rivers of ice'.

Researchers found that glaciers were moving more slowly across the terrain, having slowed by 2.4 m/year per decade on average.

The team also found the pace of surface thinning had increased from around 0.22 m/year between 2000 and 2005 to around 0.57 m/year between 2015 and 2020.

As glaciers become thinner, they experience lower driving stress, causing them to flow more slowly.

Daily News Analysis

- **Cryosphere Mechanics:** Ice flow depends on gravitational driving stress, ice thickness, and surface slope. Mass balance deficits directly impair glacier transport velocity.
- **Climatological Drivers:** Zaskar glaciers rely primarily on winter precipitation supplied by mid-latitude **Western Disturbances**, making them distinct from monsoon-fed eastern Himalayan glaciers.

Environment, Disaster & Science

- **The "Third Pole":** The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) holds the largest freshwater reserve outside the polar regions. Cryospheric degradation threatens ecological stability.
- **Disaster Risks (GLOFs):** Glacial retreat and lake formation increase risks of **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)** and slope instabilities in high-altitude terrains.
- **Technological Infrastructure:** Satellite altimetry and remote sensing must be coupled with ground-based field measurements (like Ground-Penetrating Radar) to validate subglacial hydrological models.

Conclusion

The slowing of Zaskar glaciers highlights that climate warming not only melts ice but fundamentally disables the mechanical movement of the Himalayan cryosphere. To safeguard downstream water security, India must expand high-altitude automatic weather stations, strengthen ground-validation research, and build climate-resilient water management frameworks across the Indus river basin.

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UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding glacier movement:

1. Glacier flow is influenced by ice thickness and surface slope.
2. Reduction in ice thickness can reduce gravitational driving stress.
3. Glacier retreat always implies an increase in glacier flow velocity.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans:B)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question:What factors control the movement of glaciers? Explain how climate-induced ice thinning can alter glacier dynamics.(10 Marks, 150 Words)

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Page 08 : GS II : Indian Polity / Preliminary Examination

The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha recently passed the **Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026**. While the legislation aims to overhaul tribunal administration and align with past judicial mandates, it reignites the friction between executive administrative oversight and judicial independence—a core pillar of the Constitution's basic structure.

Key Highlights & Positive Provisions

- **Restoration of Tenure:** Re-establishes standardized 5-year terms for tribunal members, resolving past uncertainty surrounding shorter tenures.
- **Uniform Service Conditions:** Standardizes salaries, allowances, and operational terms across various technical tribunals.
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Introduces a **National Tribunals Data Grid** to improve case tracking, transparency, and data integration.
- **Transition Security:** Ensures already pending appointments are protected and not stranded mid-process.

Core Concerns & Issues Raised

- **Excessive Executive Delegation (Section 14 & Section 3):** Leaves member qualifications, selection modes, and service terms to executive rule-making rather than specifying them in primary legislation.
- **Diluted Institutional Autonomy of NTC:** The Centre retains dominant control over appointments and administration of the National Tribunals Commission (NTC), merely consulting the Chief Justice of India (CJI) for judicial positions.
- **Executive Pre-Screening (Section 16):** Mandates that complaints against tribunal members first be screened by the concerned Ministry before reaching the NTC for inquiry, introducing a potential conflict of interest.
- **Executive Control over Review Bodies:** Ministries often remain parties in technical disputes, making executive administrative control over tribunals a structural flaw.

Related Static Dimensions & SC Jurisprudence

Landmark Case / Principle	Key Judicial Ratio
S.P. Sampath Kumar (1987) & L. Chandra Kumar	Established that tribunal decisions remain subject to High Court judicial review, as judicial review is an integral part of the Basic Structure .

In the way

The government should not be able to remove tribunal members at will

Tribunals have a *raison d'être* in the justice system: they allow specialists to settle technical disputes faster than the judiciary could. In *S.P. Sampath Kumar* (1987) and *L. Chandra Kumar* (1997), the Supreme Court said that tribunals' decisions remain subject to review by High Courts because judicial review is part of the basic structure. Sensible though they were, the orders left a structural flaw standing. Tribunals have historically been administered by the same Ministries whose decisions the tribunal might have to review. In *Rojer Mathew* (2019), the Court recommended an independent, statutory National Tribunals Commission (NTC) to oversee the selection and administration of tribunals. However, Parliament used the Finance Act 2017 to give the executive more control over appointments and the Tribunals Reforms Ordinance 2021 to reinstate conditions the Court had rejected. The final straw was the Court's judgment in *Madras Bar Association* (2025), where it struck down the objectionable provisions Parliament had re-enacted, restored the previous framework, and gave the government four months to establish the NTC. That is the Tribunal Reforms Bill 2026, which the Lok Sabha passed on August 10 with no discussion, and the Rajya Sabha on August 11. To its credit, *inter alia*, the Bill restores the five-year terms for tribunal members, introduces uniform service conditions, includes provisions for a National Tribunals Data Grid, and does not maroon already pending appointments.

However, the Bill still does not give the NTC enough institutional autonomy. For one, Section 14 leaves the qualifications, manner of selection, salaries, allowances, and other conditions of service of tribunal members to future executive rules. But in *Rojer Mathew*, Justice Deepak Gupta had held that defining who is qualified to exercise judicial power is an essential legislative function that cannot be delegated to rulemaking. Yet, the Bill claims consonance with the 2025 judgment while making room for the sort of delegation the judge's line of reasoning had resisted. Experts have also flagged similarly vague language in Section 3. Further, under Section 16, a Ministry will first screen a complaint before it passes to the NTC for inquiry. So, while the process is more elaborate than it was in 2021, the Centre still appoints the NTC's members, only consulting the CJI for the chairperson and judicial members, and retains substantial influence over its finances and administration. That is essentially a continuing failure: a commission designed to insulate tribunals from executive control cannot be thus subject to the terms of the executive. The government must make the NTC fully independent by forsaking its power to appoint or remove its members at will.

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Landmark Case / Principle	Key Judicial Ratio
(1997)	
Rojer Mathew (2019)	Recommended an independent statutory National Tribunals Commission (NTC) . Justice Deepak Gupta held that defining qualifications for exercising judicial power is an essential legislative function that cannot be delegated to executive rules.
Madras Bar Association Judgments (2021 / 2025)	Struck down executive attempts to control terms/appointments, mandating the setup of a fully independent NTC.

Conclusion & Way Forward

Tribunals exist to offer specialized and swift dispute resolution, but they cannot effectively perform quasi-judicial functions under the shadow of executive control. To safeguard judicial independence, Parliament must ensure the NTC functions as an autonomous, self-governing body with independent funding, selection mechanisms, and disciplinary oversight.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Tribunals were created to reduce the burden on courts, but their effectiveness depends upon institutional independence." Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

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India's electric vehicle (EV) transition is advancing through strong policy pushes and expanding manufacturing. However, current policies prioritize **recycling over reuse** through initiatives like the Voluntary Vehicle Fleet Modernization Program (Scrappage Policy). True circularity follows a hierarchy: **Reduce → Reuse → Recycle**. Integrating EV retrofitment fills a critical policy gap, allowing structurally sound Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) vehicles to transition into electric powertrains without premature scrapping.

Core Analysis: The Case for Retrofitment over Scrappage

- **Circularity vs. Recycling:** Current frameworks like the Motor Vehicles (RVSF) Rules, 2021 and Environment Protection (End of Life Vehicles) Rules, 2025 focus heavily on material recycling. While recycling recovers raw materials, **reuse preserves functionality and embedded value** in existing chassis and vehicle bodies.
- **Environmental Strain of Premature Scrappage:** Scrapping a single two-wheeler yields ~90 kg of recyclable material and ~18 kg of landfill waste. Extrapolated across India's ~30 crore vehicle fleet, a pure scrap-first approach would generate **2.7 crore tonnes of recyclable waste** and **0.54 crore tonnes of landfill waste**.
- **Decoupling Age from Condition:** A vehicle can be polluting while maintaining high structural integrity. Retrofitting replaces the ICE and fuel system with an electric powertrain, preventing premature disposal while reducing emissions.

Proposed Three-Tier National Vehicle Hierarchy



Resource efficiency: Retrofitment supports circular economy principles by extending vehicle life where safety permits, thereby reducing both material demand and waste generation. ALLEN EGENUSE, J.

The missing 'reuse' principle in India's EV transition journey

As transport electrification gathers pace in India, there is a need to incorporate existing vehicles into the transition in a resource-efficient manner. Along with an effective scrappage policy, vehicle retrofitment can extend the life of structurally sound vehicles by integrating an electric powertrain

Jaideep Saraswat
Ashish Dokania

India's electric mobility transition is gathering momentum. Electric vehicle adoption is rising, manufacturing investments are expanding, and policy support continues to strengthen. Meanwhile, circular economy principles are becoming increasingly embedded in India's sustainability and industrial policy frameworks. Yet, circularity is not a single action – it is built on a hierarchy that prioritises reducing resource consumption, reusing existing assets, and recycling materials only when products have genuinely reached the end of their useful life.

India's policy framework has made important progress on the recycling dimension of this hierarchy. The Motor Vehicles (Registration and Functions of Vehicle Scrapping Facility) Rules, 2021, and the Environment Protection (End of Life Vehicles) Rules, 2025, have strengthened the framework for responsible vehicle recycling and material recovery. As of January 2026, 129 Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities were operational across 21 States and Union Territories, and 4.3 lakh vehicles had been processed through them. This represents important progress in building a formal ecosystem for vehicle recycling and resource recovery.

However, circularity is not only about managing waste after it is created, but equally about preserving value before assets become waste. That's why the principle of reuse deserves greater attention within India's electric mobility transition.

India has one of the world's largest vehicle populations. As the country pursues transport electrification, the challenge is not only how many new electric vehicles can be sold, but also how existing vehicles can be integrated into

the transition in the most resource-efficient manner. An effective scrappage policy is essential for removing vehicles that have genuinely reached the end of their useful lives. Yet, treating every ageing vehicle as a candidate for disposal risks overlooking a significant opportunity to extend asset life while simultaneously accelerating electrification.

Vehicle retrofitment offers one such pathway. By replacing the internal combustion engine, fuel system, and related components of an existing vehicle with an electric powertrain, and retaining the core vehicle structure, retrofitment enables the continued use of assets that remain structurally sound. In circular economy terms, it is a practical expression of reuse. Rather than recovering value only after a vehicle becomes waste, retrofitment preserves and extends the value already embedded in the asset.

The distinction is important. Recycling recovers materials. Reuse preserves functionality.

The significance of retrofitting
A vehicle can be old yet structurally sound. It can have a polluting engine while retaining a strong chassis, intact body, and years of potential service life remaining. In such cases, retrofitting the vehicle to electric powertrain through certified technology becomes the more circular option than scrapping. This is not a competing strategy to scrappage. It is the missing middle path that policy has not focused on yet.

The environmental mathematics underscore why this distinction matters. A single two-wheeler generates approximately 90 kilograms of material for recycling and 18 kilograms of landfill waste when scrapped. Scaled across India's vehicle fleet of approximately 30 crore vehicles, a scrap-first approach would generate 2.7 crore tonnes of

recyclable material alone, in addition to generating 0.54 crore tonnes of landfill waste that strains land and environmental resources.

Retrofitment mitigates this burden by extending vehicle life where safety permits, thereby reducing both material demand and waste generation. This aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goal no. 12 – responsible consumption and production – is not coincidental. Retrofitment directly supports the call for sustainable consumption patterns, better resource efficiency, and reduced waste.

Scrappage contributes to circularity by recovering materials from vehicles that have genuinely reached the end of their useful lives. Retrofitment contributes to circularity by preventing vehicles with structural integrity from reaching that stage prematurely. Both are necessary; the question is which pathway each vehicle follows.

A vehicle hierarchy approach
Policy should be designed to treat vehicles based on their condition rather than age alone. A useful starting point is a national vehicle hierarchy framework that distinguishes between three distinct pathways.

The first pathway addresses vehicles that remain safe, compliant, and efficient. These should continue operating with routine maintenance. Not every older vehicle is problematic, and age alone should not trigger removal from service.

The second pathway is retrofitment, which applies to vehicles with sound structural integrity but ageing, inefficient, or polluting powertrains. These vehicles can be transformed into electric vehicles through certified conversion processes, extending their useful lives while reducing emissions and fossil fuel dependence.

In the third pathway, vehicles proceed to scrappage and recycling. It applies

exclusively to vehicles with compromised safety, severe structural degradation, accident damage, significant corrosion, or conditions that render continued operation unsafe.

Such a hierarchical framework would align India's mobility transition with genuine circular economy principles. It would recognise that not all vehicles are alike and that policy must distinguish between assets that have exhausted their value and assets that retain substantial utility.

The deeper question
India's transport sector transition is not a competition between new EVs and older vehicles. Rather, it is a question about how India approaches resource efficiency during an energy transformation. The circular economy hierarchy exists for a reason. It prevents waste before it is created and recycles only after a product has genuinely reached the end of its useful life. The distinction avoids unnecessary scrappage.

If India adopts an age-assessed transition pathway, it would signal that it genuinely understands this circularity principle. It would make scrappage more acceptable because citizens would perceive that older vehicles are not dismissed indiscriminately but assessed for their potential transformation. It would advance authentic circularity.

India is emerging as a global leader in energy transition. It can equally lead in how transitions are managed. Not only through waste, but through wisdom. That is not simply sustainability. That is the principle that has made India's economy resilient across centuries.

(Jaideep Saraswat is the Associate Director of the Clean Power, Electric Mobility & Emerging Technologies vertical at Visudha Foundation, and Ashish Dokania is the CEO of Green Tiger Mobility Private Limited. The authors declare no competing interest.)

Instead of blanket age-based restrictions, India needs a condition-based, three-pathway strategy:

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1. Pathway 1: Maintenance & Retention

- Target: Vehicles that are safe, structurally intact, and compliant with emission/fitness standards.
- Action: Retain on roads with routine maintenance, ensuring age alone does not trigger removal.

2. Pathway 2: Electric Retrofitment (The "Reuse" Bridge)

- Target: Vehicles with sound structural integrity but old, inefficient, or polluting ICE powertrains.
- Action: Convert to EVs using certified retrofitment kits, extending useful life and reducing fuel reliance.

3. Pathway 3: Scrappage & Recycling

- Target: Vehicles with compromised safety, severe structural degradation, corrosion, or accident damage.
- Action: Process through Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities (RVSFs) for raw material recovery.

Static Dimensions & UPSC Alignment

- **Environment & Economy:** Aligns with **UN SDG 12** (Responsible Consumption and Production) and circular economy principles.
- **Governance & Policy:** Complements statutory frameworks under the **Motor Vehicles Act, 1988** and **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- **Economic Viability:** Reduces high capital expenditure on new EVs for lower-income demographic segments, promoting an equitable energy transition.

Conclusion

To lead global climate action, India must transition from managing waste to preserving wisdom. Recognizing **retrofitment as a middle path** balances resource efficiency, economic viability, and environmental sustainability, ensuring that transport electrification is driven by true circularity.

Question: Which of the following represents the generally preferred hierarchy of resource use in a circular economy?

- A. Recycle → Reuse → Reduce
- B. Reduce → Reuse → Recycle
- C. Reuse → Recycle → Reduce
- D. Recycle → Reduce → Reuse

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "India's EV transition should move beyond vehicle replacement towards a circular mobility framework." Discuss with reference to retrofitment, reuse and recycling. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

India's rising dependence on U.S. LPG

India's reliance on the U.S. for two-thirds of its LPG signals a diversification of sources amid the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. It suggests that the country's LPG security cannot be anchored to a single geography. India must strengthen local production and build more strategic reserves

EXPLAINER

Santosh V. Perumal

The Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, said last week that 67% of India's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) came from the U.S. Although he did not mention the timeframe for when energy-hungry India "achieved" this, it is clearly a drastic shift from an earlier government decision to source about 10% of cooking gas from the U.S.

As part of crisis management, India, the world's second-largest importer of LPG, started buying cooking gas from the U.S., backed by a long-term deal signed by state-run oil refiners for 2.2 million tonnes in 2026, even as exact contracted \$/tonne or landed cargo price has not been publicly disclosed.

India's reliance on the U.S. for two-thirds of its LPG assumes significance, signalling prudent diversification of sources amid the crisis in the narrow Strait of Hormuz, which suggests that the country's LPG security cannot be anchored to a single geography.

As per Vortexa, India's LPG imports from West Asia fell almost 85% between February 2026 and June. However, India partially offset the lost flows by increasing LPG imports from other countries, including the U.S., from where India's imports in June reached 0.77 million metric tonnes.

The risk of overdependence

Overdependence on any market is risky, but relying more on a nation which keeps amorphous relations and sees partners through the lens of national interest could prove costly, as it may yield energy as a bargaining tool in bilateral trade talks. Energy-import dependence also makes monetary policy more complicated.

The U.S. has historically used financial sanctions, export controls and technology as foreign policy tools, going by the episodes in Iran, Iraq, Cuba, North Korea,



An Indian LPG carrier, Shivalik, at the Mundra Port in Gujarat. REUTERS

Syria, Russia, Venezuela, Myanmar, Libya, Sudan and Afghanistan.

Even when commercial ties are extant, the U.S. can influence third-country transactions. The Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026, proposing tariffs of up to 100% on the top five buyers of Russian oil and natural gas, is a non-tariff trade barrier.

Proximity pricing

Unlike the West Asian supplies, largely based on long-term Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA), U.S. energy exports could potentially be swayed by trade and other agendas, enhancing dependence risks. Traditionally leaning towards the Gulf region, India imports about 60% of the LPG (a mix of propane and butane) it consumes, with nearly 90% passing through the Strait of Hormuz. It could lose the advantage of proximity pricing, as U.S. shipments generally take 25-35 days, compared with 5-10 days from the Gulf.

Although the U.S. LPG (Mont Belvieu propane-based) claims a competitive edge over West Asian supplies; the reality is that the former could be cheap at the point of production, but the West Asian LPG (Saudi Aramco CP) is usually cheaper

at the disembarking point because of the much shorter shipping distance although the arithmetic has changed now due to geopolitical risk temporarily inflating the West Asian supply costs.

Politically volatile fuel

For India, cooking gas is not merely a good but a politically volatile fuel, the shortages of which would have social and political consequences; and so the priority is making it available rather than cost optimisation.

The Strait of Hormuz disruptions have led to Gulf LPG prices surging sharply, with Saudi CP rising from about \$543 per tonne in February to around \$790 in June. Under such conditions, even costlier U.S. cargoes would become attractive because they were available and reduced supply risk.

Higher Gulf benchmark, shipping disruptions and risk premia can make the U.S. LPG competitive despite its longer voyage. India may have cut Hormuz risk, but remains exposed to commodity-price, dollar and freight risks.

If U.S. inflation remains elevated, the Federal Reserve may have to keep interest rates higher for longer. Tighter U.S. monetary policy can simultaneously

strengthen the dollar, raising the rupee cost of each imported cargo.

If domestic LPG prices are held down when the global price rises amid rupee depreciation, then oil companies' under-recoveries expand, leading to more fiscal and external-sector issues.

The government recently informed the Parliament that the accumulated under-recoveries of public sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMC) was over ₹59,000 crore as of July 31 this year.

The way forward

The Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) data suggests that as of July 1, 2026, the PSU OMCs (Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum) together have 33.14 crore active domestic LPG customers, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.6% during 2015-2026. The original LPG consumption estimate is 34,692 TMT for 2026-27.

India's LPG production, which remained nearly stagnant over the past several years, has not been keeping pace with consumption growth. While LPG production was 4.3 MMT (million metric tonnes), consumption was 6.5 MMT in the first quarter of FY27.

Refineries were directed to maximise the LPG output by diverting propane, butane and other streams into the LPG pool. As per Q1FY27, LPG production saw 35.73% year-on-year increase to a total of 4.26 MMT.

At the peak of the crisis, India's OMCs ramped up their cumulative daily production of LPG from 34,000 metric tonnes (MT) to 55,000 MT, which helped the country absorb some impact of lower imports.

Australia offers strategic advantages as it is in the Indo-Pacific, outside Hormuz, and has a shorter route than the U.S., but export volumes are much smaller.

However, energy security is not about replacing one supplier with another; it is about ensuring that no single player holds all the cards. Instead, India must strengthen local production, bolster multiple supply chains and build more strategic reserves.

THE GIST

▼ The Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, said last week that 67% of India's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) came from the U.S.

▼ Unlike the West Asian supplies, largely based on long-term Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA), U.S. energy exports could potentially be swayed by trade and other agendas, enhancing dependence risks.

GS Paper II& III: International Relations and Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "India's growing dependence on U.S. LPG represents tactical flexibility rather than strategic energy security." Examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Daily News Analysis

Context : India—the world's second-largest importer of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG)—has undergone a sharp structural pivot in its energy sourcing. Statement from Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri highlights that nearly **67% of India's LPG imports** now originate from the United States. Driven by geopolitical turbulence and shipping bottlenecks in the narrow **Strait of Hormuz**, this shift represents a rapid tactical move from a baseline target of ~10% U.S. cooking gas sourcing.

While this transition preserves domestic supply stability, it replaces geographical concentration in West Asia with strategic and economic exposure to the U.S., raising important questions regarding long-term energy security.

Strategic Drivers Behind the Pivot

- **Mitigating the Strait of Hormuz Vulnerability:** Traditionally, India imported nearly 60% of its total LPG requirements, with almost 90% flowing through the Strait of Hormuz from Gulf exporters (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait). Disruption in this chokepoint between February and June 2026 saw West Asian flows drop by ~85%, forcing India to pivot quickly toward American suppliers.
- **Prioritizing Domestic Availability Over Price:** In India, cooking gas is a socially sensitive, politically volatile commodity consumed by over **33.14 crore active domestic households** (PPAC data). Ensuring uninterrupted domestic supply takes precedence over short-term price optimization.
- **Absorbing West Asian Premium Risks:** Sharp surges in Saudi Aramco Contract Prices (CP)—rising from ~\$543/tonne in February to ~\$790/tonne in June—combined with steep war-risk premiums and freight inflation, temporarily narrowed the cost gap between Gulf and U.S. cargoes.

Risks and Strategic Vulnerabilities

- **Geopolitical and Trade Leverage Risks:** Relying heavily on a single country for two-thirds of a vital household commodity creates strategic exposure. The U.S. frequently uses trade tools, technology controls, and secondary sanctions (e.g., proposed tariffs under the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act) as diplomatic leverage.
- **Logistics and Proximity Cost Disadvantage:** Shipments from the U.S. Gulf Coast take **25–35 days** to reach Indian ports, compared to just **5–10 days** from West Asia. This longer shipping time increases freight costs, turns supply chains less responsive, and elevates sensitivity to global shipping rate swings.
- **Macroeconomic and Fiscal Strain:**
 - **Currency & Interest Rate Transmission:** Elevated U.S. inflation forces the Federal Reserve to maintain higher interest rates, strengthening the U.S. Dollar. A weaker Rupee inflates the landed cost of imports.
 - **Fiscal Under-Recoveries:** When international prices rise but domestic retail LPG rates are kept artificially low to protect consumers, public sector Oil Marketing Companies (IOCL, BPCL, HPCL) incur massive under-recoveries (accumulated over ₹59,000 crore as of mid-2026).

Strategic Way Forward

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Daily News Analysis

- **Strengthening Domestic Production:** Though refineries boosted daily production from 34,000 MT to 55,000 MT during the peak crisis, consumption (6.5 MMT/quarter) continues to outpace production (4.3 MMT/quarter). Refineries must continue diverting heavy hydrocarbon streams (propane/butane) into the domestic LPG pool.
- **Geographic Sourcing Diversification:** Energy security requires avoiding single-source dependency. India should expand medium-term contracts with Indo-Pacific producers such as Australia, as well as suppliers in North Africa (Algeria) and South America (Argentina).
- **Developing Strategic Petroleum & Gas Reserves:** While India possesses Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) for crude oil, it lacks equivalent large-scale strategic reserves for gas/LPG. Establishing dedicated LPG storage caverns is critical for absorbing supply disruptions.

Related Static Dimensions for UPSC

- **Energy Trilemma:** Balancing Energy Security (uninterrupted supply), Energy Equity (affordable access via schemes like Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana), and Environmental Sustainability (transitioning from biomass to clean cooking fuel).
- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY):** Expanded cooking gas access to over 100 million vulnerable households. Unstable import flows directly threaten PMUY subsidies and domestic welfare targets.
- **Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) Programme:** Managed by ISPR (Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited). Current SPR capacity stands at 5.33 MMT (Phase-1) across Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, and Padur, with Phase-2 expansion underway.

Conclusion

India's shift toward U.S. LPG demonstrates impressive tactical flexibility during a critical chokepoint crisis in West Asia. However, substituting one geographical dependency for another does not provide long-term structural security. True energy autonomy requires a balanced approach: strengthening domestic refining capacity, establishing dedicated gas storage buffers, and maintaining a widely diversified supply portfolio across multi-polar geographies.